

JULY 1958

EAST GERMANY AS I SAW IT

I am preparing this somewhat detailed account of my experience in East Germany, in order to let my family know of my actions and observations there. Let me first make it clear that this is a personal letter and the contents should be kept as personal. I must insist that you not discuss or disclose any of the facts or opinions contained hereon to the press. Most of this is my own opinion and observations and an Army Officer can not use his name on any publication without the Department of the Army approval. I feel certain that DA would not approve this document for public release.

My Unit, had moved from FRIEDBERG, Germany in late May to GRAFENWOHR, Germany to participate in field training. We do not have a suitable training area near our home station, so several times each year we move out completely and go there for our field training.

I, as the Battalion Supply Officer, S4, had some business to conduct in and around FRANKFURT Area, so on Wednesday, 4 June, I flew by helicopter to FRIEDBERG in order to take care of this business.

While a divisional unit is in training at GRAFENWOHR, the 3d Armored Division sets up a daily helicopter courier run from FRANKFURT to GRAFENWOHR. This is the helicopter which I was riding.

On 7 June, I was returning to GRAFENWOHR by helicopter. We were due to land in GRAFENWOHR at 1145 hours. At about 1200 hours, I assumed that the pilots were lost and we were flying over some territory which was not familiar to me. This did not disturb me for I didn't think that we would end up in the situation that did finally develop.

At about 1230 hours, the pilot landed to try to find out just where he was. We were immediately surrounded by Germans, who were working in fields in the area. We found out from them the direction to NURENBERG, and I assumed that we would take off and fly in that direction, but we flew in the opposite direction for the pilot thought that we were close to NURENBERG, and that we must fly East to reach GRAFENWOHR.

Apparently, I was the only one on the aircraft that thought that we were in EAST GERMANY. My idea that we were over the border was based on the fact that the roads were void of traffic, except for an occasional motorcycle or truck. I had observed the absence of traffic for several minutes prior to this first landing. While we were on the ground I had talked to a German on a motorcycle while the rest of the group were talking to others. At this time I felt that everyone believed that we were in the EAST ZONE. It was not discussed for we were on the ground only briefly and the noise inside a helicopter makes conversation impossible.

We took off, and as I stated, we flew Northeast along the autobahn, which runs from NUREMBERG to BERLIN. While flying I observed the ground and saw no traffic on the roads or in the towns. The people on the ground seemed to be very interested; in fact, a man riding a motorcycle almost fell off when he kept looking up at us. I didn't see much military activity; only one area looked like it was a warehouse storage area with guard towers around it.

At about 1300 hours, we landed again near an autobahn and the pilot and some of our group found out from a man, that we were located Northeast of ZWICKAU, in East Germany. I had been looking between the pilot's feet at the fuel guage and knew that we were almost completely out of gas. At this time I started to burn some security information which I had with me. The documents were covered with a plastic like cover, and the Russians later asked who had burned the film when we landed. Apparently they dug up the ashes which I burned as saw a residue which looked like burned film. There wasn't film burned at all.

The helicopter took off again in an effort to reach WEST GERMANY. We knew that the aircraft was about out of gas, but there was a slight possibility that the guage was wrong and that we might make it, but both tanks finally give completely out of gas and we went down like a sack of rocks. The pilot picked a spot to set it down and did a very good job of making an emergency landing. The landing gear washed out when we hit and the rotor chopped off the tail feather of our bird. No was injured at all. We were all a bit shaken up, but I think that was due to the place of landing rather than the impact of landing. No one in the group knew exactly what to do so we decided to set tight where we were and let them come and get us if they wanted us. We all got busy and checked over our documents and get rid of any classified material. One officer, Captain Jones, went over to the nearby autobahn and flagged down a policeman. Soon after that the police came in force.

The police surrounded us with what looked like about fifteen (15) or twenty (20) men. Some were armed with submachine guns. After we were pretty well covered on all sides a "Wheel" from the police approached us and directed us to the road and into an open police wagon.

Soon we were bouncing down the road toward the police station in ZWICKAU. We got there at about 1430 or 1500 hours. They took us into an office and there we sat until about 1630 hours, when a Russian Colonel came in and looked around a bit. He had a female interpeter with him. She spoke German and Russian and spoke to us as if we were hard of hearing. It wasn't deafness, but it was our poor knowledge of the German Language, that made her a little hard to understand. One of the officers, Captain Brister, could understand and speak a little German and the meeting was not a complete failure.

Shortly after that we were separated. I was taken to a small room and sat there until about 1945 hours. During this time, I was questioned a little bit, mostly about my identity. They also gave me a good shakedown for weapons. They sent an East German soldier with me as guard. He was a very dirty and rough looking individual to have been in a military uniform. He looked as if he had just come in from an extended field trip without any water being made available to him. In fact, I had a hard time smoking the pipe tobacco which I had bummed from him. By this time, I had smoked my last bit of tobacco.

While in this room in the ZWICKAU Police Station, I was treated with my first East German dinner. It consisted of a roll, butter, soda water and a piece of German sausage, that you couldn't have cut with a saw. I hacked at it a while and ate my bread and butter.

The only other thing that impressed me at ZWICKAU was my short visit to the filthy toilet. It was not equipped with the capitalist item - toilet paper, but they did put some of their Communist propaganda to good use in the toilets.

About 2000 hours, we were all taken in the custody of Russian officers, to a small Russian Detachment at KARL MARX STAD. I rode in the vehicle with an English speaking Russian Major, a Lieutenant Colonel and a Junior officer. On each hill the driver put the vehicle out of gear, in order to save gas, I suppose. The vehicle was a jeep and more comfortable than ours, I might add.

The major talked to me considerably, mostly about everyday things. He didn't seem too interested in trying to get any military information and ran into a blank wall when he did try. We talked a little about what we did on vacation and the clothes that we wore when off duty. He told me that he read American newspapers and had been associated with the US Army in World War II, when the US tied in with the Russians in Germany.

We arrived at a small Russian Military Detachment just after dark. They directed me into a small office where I stayed for a considerable time and finally decided that they were going to leave me there overnight. I laid down on a desk and using my bag as a pillow, started to try to get some rest. About 2300 hours, they aroused me and I joined the other Americans and about six (6) Russians for dinner.

After the meal we were told that at 0800 hours the next day we would go to another location to have breakfast with the East German Army and then would proceed to be turned over to US Forces. I then returned to my desk with the red cloth covering. There I stayed until about 0300 hours, when I was awakened to be taken to another building where I was given a bed.

The Russian soldiers didn't impress me as being well kept. They didn't seem to exhibit very much military courtesy and their uniforms were not kept anyway near the standards of the US Army.

The buildings were in pretty good repair, but were not very clean, especially the latrines. These toilets were not equipped with capitalist items, "toilet paper", but they too; made good use of some of their written propaganda.

The next morning, 8 July 1958, we were all taken in sedans by East German Officer, to an old school building in a small town of FRANKENBERG, located north of KARL MARX STAD. There we were fed a good breakfast, even though the coffee was barley coffee, rather than real coffee. They gave us cigarettes, cigars, beer, soda water, and lemon flavored soda drink.

We were all questioned individually during the day. They didn't get very rough with any of us. An East German Major told us that if I wanted to get out of here, I had better cooperate and answer the questions, but he didn't shake me. They were very poor interrogators and I don't think that they could have gotten much information from any American soldiers.

Here we stayed on the night of 8 July, and were questioned again on the ninth. They also went through all of our baggage and personal items. They took all cards, papers, etc., let us keep pictures, money and items such as keys, pipe, lighters, etc.

Just prior to darkness on the evening of 9 June, we were loaded onto the back of a truck with a canvas cover. We were not given any prior warning of the move and they didn't let us know where we were going. We moved over back roads and about 1½ hours later we stopped. I had an idea that I might soon be looking through bars; in fact, there were nine (9) Americans in the back of the truck that weren't saying much.

When we did get off the truck, we found that we were in a building that resembled a typical German Gasthaus (Guesthouse) and the pictures on the walls indicated that it was an athletic club. We were directed to bedrooms and there I discovered a real jewel of a bed. It was the typical German bed with three (3) mattress sections filled with straw. The springs had been broken and sagged down so that my shoulder blades rested firmly on a slat in the bed. A few days later, I put the mattress on the floor and was able to get a little sleep that way.

Here at the Athletic Club we used our detective skill and discovered that we were located in KARL MARX STAD. They used the caretaker and servants there to serve food and clean the rooms. We made our own beds and did our own laundry, which wasn't much for we didn't have any clothes.

I luckily, had two (2) sets of underwear, a change of socks, and toilet articles. Several in the group did not have anything with them except the clothes on their backs.

On the 10th of June, I encountered two politico's dressed in civilian clothes. They questioned me a little, but they seemed mostly interested in trying to cast doubt in our minds about our government and military.

They told us such things as:

1. The Military Police would really take care of us when we returned for getting lost in East Germany.
2. The West German Government was run by Nazi Leaders and wanted war.
3. All Capitalist must have war to exist and that the USA had forces in Europe to make war.
4. The mass of people in South America didn't want USA to interfere in their affairs, as demonstrated by Nixon's reception there.
5. Thousands of jobless people are sleeping on the streets of Detroit.
6. The mass of West Germans didn't like the Americans and wanted them out of Germany.

A few days later the same people came back and returned the items taken from us previously. They didn't talk too long and the conversation was along the same lines as the previous one.

The time had begun to hang very heavy after the first few days. The only news of negotiations which were received was that our release was up to our government. They did inform us of Colonel McQuail's first trip to the East Germany Foreign Ministry, and that he was to return again for he did not have the authority to properly negotiate for our release.

The thing that worried us most was our separation from all means of contact with our families and military authorities. We didn't know just how much our families knew of our situation and physical condition. Of course, we were concerned about the welfare of our families.

We talked among ourselves a great deal during the first few days. May jokes were told, most of them being the type that are not told in mixed company. We told stories of our experiences, and they all enjoyed several of the tales that I told of my trip to California with Pa, Uncle Guss and Frances. After a few days, all the jokes and stories had given out and we continued to play cards and use a chess set that they furnished us.

The East Germans seemed to do about all they could to furnish us with the best food that they could and even went so far as to give us eggs for breakfast. They inquired as to our likes and dislikes, in cooking, and foods. Even after all this, the food was not very good to us, but I'm sure that it was good according to their standards. We were given cigarettes and cigars, and tobacco in small quantities so that we had to ask for it each day.

None of us drank the water, but we had plenty of hot tea, three (3) times a day. At night, they gave us beer, soda water, or lemon soda, so we didn't get too dehydrated.

Although they took care of our physical needs, they did not let us forget that we were prisoners. Anytime that one of us went to the toilet, we had to get one of the two (2) East German Officers on guard to go with us and stand by the door until we were finished. They seemed to take every opportunity to harass us, such as the interpreter would walk in every day or so with a big smile on his face and say "Major Kemper, I have news for you". Of course, our first reaction was that we were going to be released, or at least that he had some news of negotiations. The interpreter would then say, "that we would have eggs for breakfast or that we had a choice of dumplin's or dough balls for dinner or that we would have coffee on Sunday morning".

After a few days at the Athletic Club, we made a request to be allowed to go outside for a little while each day. The East German Major incharge gave the answer, that he would have to inquire to higher authority and afferra day or so they let us out in groups of three (3) for fifteen (15) minutes each morning. Finally after several days of more requesting, they let us outside for an additional hour in the afternoons to get some sunshine (which is not to abundant most of the time in Germany). There were guards posted all around the house and were increased when we went outside. There were usually about seven (7) men with sub-machine guns, plus four (4) or five (5) officers with pistols with us in the yard.

Previously we had been told that the guards were for our protection from the enraged populace. (We never saw any of the enraged populace). After our first visit to the yard we asked why did the guards stand with their backs to the fence and facing us, if they were protecting us from the enraged populace. The interpreter smiled and answered, "This is necessary."

As the days passed on, our food got a little better except for the evening meal which was always sliced lunch meat, East German Style. I have never been so tired of any food in my life as I was of that supper of sliced cold cuts. Then one night, we got a change, they presented us with raw ground beef with a raw egg yold sitting on top of the serving of raw meat. This is a popular German fish, called (Tartar mit Eier), but it wasn't too popular with us. One of the officers, Captain Brister ate his, but they took the rest back and cooked it for us. They seemed quite upset, because we didn't care for such a fine dish as raw hamburger meat.

We asked for reading material, movies, TV, or any other means of entertainment that they might have. Everyday we asked for a radio so that we could listen to our Armed Forces Network (AFN), but we were turned down on all such requests. Later I found out one reason that we couldn't have the radio was that their soldiers were not allowed to listen to AFN. Then too, they didn't want us to get any news except that which they wanted us to get. They did give us two (2) or three (3) magazines printed in English that were strictly propaganda sheets.

Captain Brister could read a little German, but they only gave

us the newspaper which they wanted us to have. The ones they did give us had a few items in them about us. They included, the statement that Mr. Dulles made to the effect that the USA was ready to deal with the East Germans for our release and would not stand on formalities. Colonel McQuail's visit to the East German Authorities. Some criticisms that Senator Russel made about the clumsy error made in sending Colonel McQuail to deal for our release. The papers were pretty well checked before they were offered to us.

On 25 June, we were again given some athletic warmup suits to wear. That was the first opportunity that we had to get our clothing washed for none of us had a second uniform with us.

At 2315 hours, on the evening of 25 June, we were aroused from bed and told to pack our things, that we were leaving. In addition, they took up the athletic clothes which they had given us. We then loaded into a closed police wagon and move out onto the autobahn. We were all hoping that we were heading for Berlin to be turned over to US authorities, but we didn't have any idea where we were going for they wouldn't tell us anything.

Then after diding for a little over two (2) hours, we were unloaded and were directed into a large old house. We were shown where we would eat breakfast and then shown to our bedrooms. I was happy to find a bed there that I could sleep on. It was of the three (3) section straw mattress type, but it was fairly comfortable and at least I didn't have to sleep on the floor. I was in a big airy bedroom with Lt Ellis, CWO (Mr) Malone, and Sergeant Ruffin.

The next morning, using our detective abilities again, we discovered that we were located in DRESEDEN. The house was on the outskirts of town, and around it were located several other large "Villa's". Actually the place was much better than the athletic club which we had moved from. We had more room and the bedrooms were bigger and more comfortable. At first, we didn't have any hot water and our toilet seat had a crack wich was especially talented in pinching. These were fixed after a few days, and we settled down to fairly comfortable living conditions.

We were furnished a TV set and we saw our first movie there on the 26th of June. Also after a day or so, they set up a volleyball net and allowed us to play volleyball. None of us became experts at the game, but we did get pretty good with our three (3) and four (4) man teams.

The first movie which we saw was a pretty good one. It was a Russian film titled "The Crains Fly", it was a Gold Medal Winner at the Caines Movie Festival, I think. The sound had been changed over to German. In fact, all the movies were in German, and I couldn't understand very much of it.

Later we saw other movies, some of which was documental type movies, which had been made up from old newsreels, and photographs

of letters, orders and other written documents. All these documental films were directed at throwing discredit on the Nazi Government and showing how the West German Government resembles the former Nazis and showing that several of the prominent West German Officials were associated with the Nazis. Some examples of this are: "You and Many Comrades" - showed many dead soldiers and civilians in Poland and Russia, as a result of World War II. It showed how Germany prepared for World War I and World War II. It tried to show that capitalist such as Krupp, the steel producer, were the ones that were responsible for the war and that they had to have war to exist as capitalist. "Vacations in Engel" - this showed that a former Hitler General, named Rheinefarth, was the Mayor of Engel, a West German Resort Town. The movie implied that only former SS men visited there and that they were all capitalist with automobiles.

"Teutonic Sword", this showed that General Speidel was one of Hitler's key men and that he caused many people to die. It made a big noise over the fact that a former Nazi General was now commanding the NATO forces in Europe.

"Here Lived Lenin", this showed a history of Lenin which consisted mostly of paintings of Lenin and places where Lenin had lived or spent a lot of time. The thing lasted about one and a half (hours) (1½) and I can't see how anybody could be interested in seeing that much of a picture of this type about anyone. I certainly wouldn't like to sit through one on George Washington or even Gene Talmadge.

The other movies had stories behind them, but they were all designed to promoting Socialism and Communism. After a continued showing of such pictures, I openly objected to seeing them. They then consented to allowing those who didn't care to see the movies to remain in the sitting room during the showing. The next movie several of us didn't attend. On one occasion that followed I was the only one that didn't go voluntarily, and I was directed to see the movie. The last movie that was shown, several of us objected to seeing it, but we were all directed to see it. Other than those few occasions, we were not forced to see or read any of their propaganda.

Their television is poor in comparison with that in the USA. They have an occasional afternoon movie and their night programs were mostly political speeches, plays and an occasional variety show or sports event.

The TV newscasts are very much politically influenced. It is not presented as factually as our news is. Even a quiz program we saw had only political questions and questions about Communist figures. Many of the shorts between features are directed towards slandering NATO and the Allied Countries. They are making a concerted effort at building up hate toward the Western World and especially the West German Government.

They observed while we were there the Fifth (5th) Party Day and Baltic Sea Week, both of which lasted about a week each. During

this time most of the TV time was spent showing party meeting and speeches. One program was a musical that used as its theme, "PRO-MOTE SOCIALISM and HATE THE WESTERN POWERS". The people are really to be pitied, that they have to spend so much time and effort in trying to sell their form of government and instilling fear and hate of the Western World.

On the 6th of June, we received a large box from the American Red Cross that contained cigarettes, tobacco, razors, blades, towels, soaps, toothbrushes, cards, puzzles, New Testaments, prayerbooks, and Rosaries. We were certainly glad to get these things for we needed most if it and it was something American.

On 1 July, we were told to clear off all tables in our bedrooms that night, for the next morning a cleaning woman would clean-up the rooms. On the morning of 2 July, we did this and went downstairs for breakfast. After breakfast we went outside and were told to remain there until lunchtime.

About 1200 hours, we were directed inside and upon going in we saw a marked change in the appearance of the building. On a wall was a large red panel with pictures of East German Officials on it. A table was set in one of the rooms with fancy dishes and flowers were placed all around. This was the first indication we had that anything was other than normal.

We went upstairs to prepare for lunch and looking out through the cracks in the closed shutters, we could see several of the East German Officers standing around waiting on the arrival of someone important. After a while a group of fifteen (15) or more civilians drove up and came inside. They all proceeded upstairs to where we were in the bedrooms. One of the men introduced himself as Seymore Topping of the Associated Press and showed us his credentials. He gave us a quick explanation that he was here with a group of press representatives for a press conference. He expressed surprised that we had no prior knowledge of the conference, and told us that he had had no prior warning either, except a call to be at the East German Foreign Ministry in Berlin at 0845 hours, that morning. We were completely unprepared for such a meeting, and we were in the athletic clothes which we were given. After a quick discussion among ourselves we decided to let Major Kemper be the spokesman for the entire group, and we changed into our uniforms and we went downstairs where the conference was held.

I have now read Mr. Topping's report of the meeting and it gives a very good account of it. The portion that stated that I shouted out that they were "kidnapers" was a little exaggerated, but other than that, the thing was pretty much exactly as it happened.

We were all happy to see an American. Mr. Topping tried to get an opportunity to talk to us alone, but they wouldn't let him. He did, however, get a minute or so while pictures were taken to give us a brief summary of the developments to date. This was the first real news that we had received.

During the interview, Major Kemper asked several questions as to our status and what had occurred in the negotiations. The East German Foreign Ministry representative that was in charge of the conference told us that all this was well covered in a press release that appeared in the 28th of June edition of the Official East German Newspaper and he was sure that we had read it, but we had not and let him know it. In about sixty (60) seconds after that comment was made the East German Major in charge of our detachment produced the four (4) day old paper and gave it to Major Kemper. This goes to show just how well we were informed.

On the 4th of July, we each received an individual box from the American Red Cross, that contained tobacco, candy, cards, comb, soap, soapdish, towels, etc. That evening I and three (3) other members of the group received a letter from a person in California. He offered to contact our families for us and gave us a "chin-up" message.

That evening at dinner we were told that we were going to move to a new location. They said that we had to vacate the house to make way for some East German Officers that lived there and were returning from a trip to a training area. So, we packed up and watched them pack up all the furniture to include the newly installed toilet seat and move it out of the house. I certainly felt sorry for any officers that had to make that place their home. I'm sure that it was just another one of their tales that they told us.

At 2335 hours, we departed by closed police wagon and rode over rough roads for about two hours. We arrived at another very large house and move in with all the furnishings that had been removed from the other place. Our detective abilities failed us this time for we couldn't find out where we were and didn't know until our release date, that we were only ten (10) miles east of DRESDEN. The house which we move into was very large and extremely well made. The windows and door frames, hardware and other fixtures indicated that the house had been very expensive to build. It was old and had had only a minimum amount of maintenance, but it was still in good condition.

On the 10th, all of us except two (2) officers were interviewed by an East German Lieutenant Colonel. (MSgt Ruffin and I, were interviewed together). The Lieutenant Colonel asked why we didn't write to Mr. Dulles, The President, or our Congressmen and ask that they do something to get us out. He also told me that I was quoted by Western papers as saying that I was kidnapped. I told him that I was not treated as a child that someone had stolen from his own yard, but that I was treated as a child that had wandered into another's yard and had been taken and held for ransom. He also told us that his government had been insulted by a letter which Colonel McQuail had brought with him to the negotiations that was addressed to "WHOM IT MAY CONCERN". He stated that the USA wouldn't have addressed a letter to any other Sovereign State in that manner and that they considered it an insult. He further stated that international

law required that negotiations of this nature would take place between State Departments and that the USA's failure to comply with international law was the cause of our being held.

We received more mail on the 8th and 10th. These deliveries included letters from the USA. The period from 10 July to 18 July, went very slowly and we were getting concerned about no mail delivery for we knew that people were writing to us. After the US Troops landed in LEBONON, they tightened up on us somewhat. In addition to the stopping of mail, they took away our balcony that we had been using and wouldn't let us play cards or sit in the dining room as we had been doing. They became very cool and for a while I thought that may be we would end up being the first prisoner's of war in World War III,

On the 18th, Major Kemper asked to see an official of the East German Government in order to make a few request for things that would make our lives a little easier. They said, that the request would be forwarded. That night, about nine o'clock, they called Major Kemper into a meeting. Upon returning he said, that the man he saw was a man from the Minsitry of Interior, and that he had happened to be in the area that day. He further stated that mail would be there that night and that the following morning a man from the Foreign Ministry would be there to talk to us and would be able to answer our questions.

A few minutes after this meeting, with the Interior representative, four (4) of us were called out to pick up mail and packages from home. I know that the mail must have been there sometime, but they just wouldn't give it to us. We all received packages from home and lots of mail. Here is a list of mail other than from Mary Ellen, which I received while in East Germany.

WRITER	MAILED	RECEIVED
Mama	2 Jul 58	8 Jul 58
Frances Tatum	3 Jul 58	8 Jul 58
Joe Westbrook	4 Jul 58	10 Jul 58
Connie Westbrook	4 Jul 58	10 Jul 58
Mama	4 Jul 58	10 Jul 58
Ruth Brinson	5 Jul 58	18 Jul 58
Emily Brown	7 Jul 58	18 Jul 58
Emily Brown	8 Jul 58	18 Jul 58
Mrs. J. C. Custer	8 Jul 58	18 Jul 58
Ben Gibson	7 Jul 58	18 Jul 58
Martha Clark	8 Jul 58	18 Jul 58
Aunt Lil Pennington	10 Jul 58	18 Jul 58
Aunt Lora Mae Leverett	8 Jul 58	18 Jul 58
Ann Campbell	7 Jul 58	18 Jul 58
Myrtle Westbrook	10 Jul 58	18 Jul 58

After my relase I also received mail that had been sent to the Red Cross in Berlin to be forwarded on to me in East Germany.

I will stop here to tell a little about our group, the senior man was Major Kemper. He is the one that had to deal with the East Germans on all administration matters and requests. He did pretty well, but he had to be pushed a little at times. A couple of the Artillery Captains did a good job at pushing.

Major Zeller, was very nice at all times and I grew to like and respected him very much.

Captain Brister, was a comic and he didn't have many silent moments during the entire six (6) weeks period. He was always making noise about something and kept us pretty well entertained.

Captain Athanison, also has a lot of humor about him, and entertained us with such things as poses of Napoleon and John L. Sullivan. He is of Greek Descent and lived at Tarpon Springs, Florida, during his youth. He also attended Georgia Tech.

Captain Jones, was always ready for an argument with anyone about anything.

Lt Ellis, the pilot, attended the University of Georgia, at the same time that I did. I knew him in school, but we did not run around in the same crowd. In fact, he had been in the 3d Armored Division for three (3) months and I didn't know he was here until I got on the helicopter in FRIEDBERG on the morning of the 7th of June. He and I got along together fine and enjoyed talking over old times, and telling stories about the "GREAT SOVEREIGN STATE OF GEORGIA". He was gravely concerned over our situation and lost about twenty-five (25 lbs) pounds while we were there.

CWO (Mr.) Malone, the co-pilot was a Kansas Farmer, and former rodeo rider. His greatest talent was talk and he did plenty.

MSgt Ruffin, was the only enlisted man in the group. He conducted himself well all the time and did not at any time conduct himself as anything but a good NCO, even though he ate, slept and lived with eight (8) officers for the six (6) weeks. I have a great respect for him.

Now back to my story, on the morning of the 19th of July, we were awakened an hour early in order to eat and get breakfast things cleared away before the Government Representatives arrived for our meeting.

About 0800 hours, a group of civilians with some cameramen came in and one of them introduced himself as Mr Ludwig of the East German Red Cross. He started talking about the developments to date in the negotiations between the two (2) governments. He stated that the negotiations had completely broken down. Then he told us that the USA had authorized the American Red Cross to negotiate for our release and that the East German Government had authorized the East German Red Cross to negotiate. He then told us that the representatives of the two (2) Red Cross Organizations had gotten

together and arranged for our releases and that we were to be released that day.

Little time was wasted in getting our things packed, even though the Red Cross packages and packages from home had increased our baggage considerably. By about 0915 hours, we had boarded a small bus and were on our way. This was the first real opportunity that we had had to see much of the country. Things there in East Germany are quite different from West Germany.

The autobahn was in bad repair and all the bridges were only two (2) lanes rather than the normal four (4) lanes. The secondary roads were also in very poor condition. I don't suppose it makes too much difference however, for there isn't much traffic on the roads. The cars and trucks look like they are plenty well used. We saw only a few new vehicles.

The farm land looked good, but the towns looked like a scab. The shop windows didn't have the abundant look as they do in West Germany. The people looked healthy, but their clothes didn't look very good. Also there wasn't very many people moving around on the streets.

Don't let me mislead you to believe that these people are so backwards, that we can forget them. We certainly can't, for they are very much there, and I now know that we have a real enemy behind the IRON CURTIAN. I didn't really understand many of the stands that our Government takes toward the Communist block countries, but I do now. We have never been taught through TV, newspapers and movies to hate the Communists; but they are being taught to hate and fear us. I'm afraid that one day, they might do as a scared animal might do -- STRIKE!!!! I certainly hope they don't, but there is no question about our forces having a mission here in Europe.

We traveled in the bus until about 1320 hours, at which time we reached the border crossing site. We stopped on the East German side, and went into an Aid Station which was operated by the East German Red Cross. A few minutes later, two American Red Cross representatives came in sat down with the two East German representatives. They completed negotiations which consisted of signing for us by name, signing for adequate food and housing and paying for the cost of our upkeep.

We then got back in the bus and road about six hundred (600 yards) to the bridge that crossed the border. We then took our bags and walked onto the bridge and proceeded on across the line painted on the bridge, time 1410 hours, and we were greeted on the West side by about a dozen American Officers, and enlisted men. All this was done with very little commotion, except for a few pictures.

We then got into Army sedans and were carried to a helicopter landing site at the small town of HOF, where we had sandwiches, coffee and milk. A few more pictures were taken and at 1500 hours, we took off in two (2) helicopters and flew to the 3d Armored Division Airstrip,

at Frankfurt. We landed at Frankfurt at 1600 hours.

I was the first one to get out of the aircraft and was greeted by General Van Natta, the Commanding General of the 3d Armored Division. He directed us to a bus and we were hustled off to his office at Division Headquarters. There he gave us a short briefing telling us what we had to do for the next few hours, welcomed us home and dispelled some rumors about us or our families being sent back to the states.

From the General's office building, we stepped into our bus and were taken to a Medical Clearing Station, where a dozen doctors were standing by to give us a complete physical examination. This was, by the way, the most complete check I've had since I've been in the Army.

After the physical, I went next door where I had a short de-briefing by a counter-intelligence agent. When I finished this I stepped from the building into a sedan which carried me back to the airstrip where I stepped into a running helicopter. The helicopter flew me to BAD NAUHEIM and landed right in the housing area where the wife and children were waiting for me. This was about 1845 hours. It was a great moment for me when we landed there at my home.

I am very grateful for all the effort that the Army put forth in getting us released and the very efficient handling we received upon being released. None of you are in a position to really realize the vast amount of work that was done by the US Army, while we were in East Germany, but you can rest assured that we were not forgotten.

When I got home I only had a little over an hour to get ready to go back to FRANKFURT to a press conference. We had dinner and I changed clothes. At 1950 hours a helicopter picked me up near my home and flew me back to FRANKFURT. By 2200 hours, the press conference was over and Mary Ellen along with some friends met me and we rode back home together. I then had the rest of the weekend free to spend with the family.

Mary Ellen had told the children that I had gone to the field in a big helicopter, so when I landed there at home in a helicopter they thought that that was the greatest. Even Joe is still talking about the helicopter.

That concludes my story about my trip to East Germany. I didn't have any idea that when I came to Germany, I would do quite so much touring of Europe.

Let me include in this some news about the WESTBROOKS.

When I returned to the battalion I found that orders had been cut on the morning of my release date, relieving me of my duties as Battalion S4, and assigning me as S3 Air. I was glad to get a change in jobs for I had enough experience as S4, and I was very happy to get the job which I did. In this job I will be working with plans and operations, which is somewhat new to me and is very good experience.

I also, am working again for Captain Stephen O. Edwards, a former company commander of mine. I like working with him and I know I will enjoy my new work.

My tour here in Germany is scheduled to end in February 1959, I have given some consideration to extending for a short period, but have not decided what to do about it yet. The Department of the Army could extend my tour for three (3) or four (4) months so that I could go from here to the Armored School at Fort Knox, Kentucky, to attend the Armored Advance Class there. I will probably be slated to start that in September 1959.

I took a week's leave and carried the family down to the US Army Recreation Area in GARMISCH (South of MUNICH) during the week of 29 July 1958. We all enjoyed it very much. The weather was very nice and we all got plenty of sunshine and relaxation. That is certainly a fine place to take leaves there in the BAVARIAN ALPS.

I want to thank all of you for the many nice cards, letters and telegrams that were sent to Mary Ellen and me. It was a big help to both of us to hear from the family and friends. Mary Ellen especially appreciated those which came to her, and you know how much the mail in East Germany helped me. I further want to express my appreciation to those of you who were making efforts to speed our release.

It will be wonderful to get back home and see some of my friends and family. I hope that I will be able to see you all upon my return to the USA early next year.

Appreciately,


THOMAS J. WESTBROOK

Friedberg, Germany
25 August 1958

P.S. - Left out in typing.

1. Concerning the dinner with the Russians- They served a German brandy, not Vodka, with a meal consisting of fried pork, potatoes, gravy, raw fish, and hot tea. Other than the raw fish, the meal tasted pretty good. They didn't fix things up very fancy, but the tin plates didn't look too bad with good crystal and a clean table cloth.

2. Concerning the first mail - On the morning of the 5th of July we received another individual box from the Red Cross and some greatly appreciated mail from our wives. This was our first news from home.